

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Making God Feel At-Home

After the narration of leaving Egypt, the Splitting of the Sea, the Revelation of the Decalogue and its Law Code and their acceptance by Israel, Moses ascends Mount Sinai, presumably to Receive the Law. Then without explanation the Torah follows this up with an apparent non sequitur: the collection of money and supplies for the Tabernacle and a long and detailed description of its building. Making sense of the connection between our Parasha and what preceded has been the subject of countless interpretations. Some say that it was specifically the instructions for the making of the Tabernacle which was given to Moses during his ascent at the end of last week's Parasha. After all, we are told that the construction plan for the Tabernacle and furnishings were explicitly shown to Moses, and that likely happened at his preceding ascent. And even if what Moses obtained during the ascent was primarily the Decalogue and the Law Code, the Law Code must have been part of a broader Torah, which would have encompassed the Tabernacle instructions. Still, the necessity for the Tabernacle is not well explained, except to say that building a Sanctuary is necessary in order that God "dwell in their midst (25:8-9)." Why couldn't Israel be charged with following the Laws without having God dwell among them? Couldn't basic compliance with the moral laws of the Torah have been achieved as a separate, first goal, long before even thinking about building a luxurious Place of Worship?

For our Torah, the answer is obviously that assuring compliance with the Law Code and the building of a Tabernacle in order to have God dwell among Israel are inseparable goals. Indeed, the aim of the Ten Commandments, stated explicitly in their introductory narration in 19:5-6, was in order that Israel become God's treasured, holy nation: That was the goal of the Law to begin with – that God should enter into a close relationship with Israel. The acceptance of the Law Code was the set of terms and conditions for entering into that relationship. Traditional Jewish lore likens the Giving of the Torah to sections of the "marriage" ceremony between God and Israel, with the Torah functioning as something like a marriage contract or setting of terms. But what necessarily follows is the planning for the outfitting and the actual building of a home and bringing the couple therein, so that they may dwell together – the consummate aim of the relationship. Still, however, such a meticulously-detailed, luxurious and expensive plan for God's Sanctuary is not justified by such an explanation. Nor is it justified by comparison and contrast with other idolatrous sanctuaries.

Ultimately, the purpose behind the Sanctuary is to make it attractive to God, to arouse His Favor and to make Him always want to "come home" to His Abode to dwell therein. Although its materials are exquisitely designed and far above the ordinary in level, ultimately its basic components are just like those of any home. The meals and mealtimes of God largely make use of ingredients found in ordinary homes. Lately I have been much reminded of the movie "Ratatouille," scenes from which I pass daily in the window of a local cheese shop. Prof. Samuel J. Abrams of Sarah Lawrence posted an article in which he discusses the scene in which the feared food critic Anton Ego takes a single bite of Remy's ratatouille and is suddenly transported in time back to when he was a child. Having fallen off his bike, his mother had comforted him with a humble dish of ratatouille, and Remy's ratatouille obviously hit that special spot, tasting "just like mama used to make." The food critic is won over not by the brilliance or impressiveness of the concoction, but by the simple taste of home. In his article, Prof. Abrams writes about taste being about trust, caring, and love, long before it became judgment and evaluation. He writes about the importance of traditional, classic foods in cultural memory. According to Prof. Abram's view, Anton Ego is won over not so much by his developed taste, but by memory and recognition from before he developed that discriminatory taste.

However, I would argue that the food critic is won over by his taste as well. The plain rustic dish made simply just like mama's has an undeniable attraction, and our "comfort foods" have the attraction of being known sources for satiation and sustenance. God's Abode must be crafted many levels above our own. Its Incense is prepared from fine and rare spices. But what will attract God to dwell therein is that which deep down will attract many a husband - a sense of trust and home. The saying that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach" has fallen out of favor, as well as the end of keeping up gracious homes and sanctuaries. We have moved towards more impressive, innovative, and spicy displays as models of attraction. But the most especially attractive spice of the Jew is the Shabbat spice which gives the taste of a Jewish home to his humble stew. To attract God or man, we must seek to make them feel at-home.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Terumah

February 20-21, 2026 | 4 Adar, 5786

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 326 | Haftarah: 336
Kaplan: Parasha: 380 | Haftarah: 1120

Candle Lighting | 5:19 pm

Evening Services | 5:15 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik | *5786 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

West Point Jewish Chapel Choir & Rabbi Soloveichik's Final

Semiquincentennial Lecture | following services

Kiddush Luncheon | following the lecture | *see inside for full sponsor listings*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:30 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 4:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 5:15 pm

Habdala | 6:09 pm

Parent-Child Learning | 7:15 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday: 5:15 pm

Monday-Thursday (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

IN CELEBRATION OF THE US SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

And 250 Years of Jewish Life in the United States



THIS Shabbat, February 21

After Morning Services

Rabbi Soloveichik's Major Lectures

Final Session:

The Declaration, The Constitution,
and the Future of American Jewry

Stay up to date at shearithisrael.org/us-250.

The West Point Jewish Chapel Choir

Kiddush Luncheon in honor of Rabbi Soloveichik's Final 250th Lecture & The West Point Jewish Chapel Choir

Thank you to our sponsors:

Sponsors: Mr. & Mrs. Gideon Gordon, in memory of Mr. Amir Shooshani
Susan Lobel, in memory of her father, Seymour Z. Lobel, a US Army Veteran

Supporters: Juan Mesa-Freydell

Dr Manuel Vásquez Senior

Contributors: Aviva Miller, Marc Finkelstein & family, in honor of the cadets of West
Point's Jewish Choir, Milton Miller MD z"l, and their brave son-in-law Joshua, who works
diligently for the safety of the State of Israel every day

The Roberts family

Elaine Rubel

Scott Weiner

Faith for Food

The Masbia UWS Food Annex at Congregation Shearith Israel

Learn more & contribute at shearithisrael.org/giving/faith-for-food

This year-round weekly kosher food pantry provides ample and nutritious grocery
staples to our neighbors each Tuesday.

To Help Someone in Manhattan with Food Insecurity

Email CSIANnex@masbiarelieff.org with a name and cell phone number. A trained Masbia
representative will reach out regarding enrollment.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Condolences to Rebecca Chaplan (& David Nathan), upon the passing of
Rebecca's sister, Janet Chaplan Pew.

COMING UP

Register at shearithisrael.org

Special Presentation from the Sisterhood & Shearith Israel League

Cinematic Memorial Event: Arthur Cohn

THIS Sunday, February 22 | 2:00 pm | \$20 | In person, at Shearith Israel

We will host a cinematic memorial lecture by Arthur's son, Emanuel Cohn, who will celebrate
his father's Academy-Award-winning legacy with a talk on his life and work, including a
selection of clips from his films.

AUTHOR EVENT: A Conversation with Naomi Kehati Bronner

Author of On the Wings of Eagles: From Yemen to Zion - A Family Memoir

Featuring a reading and Q&A with the author

Sunday, March 1 | 3:45 pm | At Shearith Israel

PURIM PREVIEW

Visit shearithisrael.org/purim5786 for all your Purim needs, including:

- Matanot L'Ebyonim
- Purim Dinner & Breakfast Sponsorships
- Women's Megillah Reading
- Youth Purim Activities (see below)

KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*In the Mishkan tent I glow so bright,
Seven little flames give gentle light.
Made from one piece of hammered gold,
A holy lamp from days of old.*

THIS Motzei Shabbat: **Parent-Child Learning**

Final session, with Baruch-Lev Kelman | 7:15 pm

"Alphabetim: An Alphabet Workshop"

Youth Hamentaschen Bake-Off

Sunday, March 1 | 3:00 pm | with Dalya & Jake

All ages welcome. Sign up or sponsor at shearithisrael.org/purim5786.

Purim Palooza!

Purim night, Monday, March 2 | 6:00 pm, during Megillah reading

Crafts, prizes, Purim story, and more! Come dressed in your best costume for a Purim
Costume Contest! Sign up or sponsor at shearithisrael.org/purim5786.